

Democrats push ahead with school openings in California as state's death total approaches 50,000

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Yesterday, nearly 500 people died of coronavirus in the state of California, according to the Worldometer website, pushing the state's death toll to 45,971. While total infections and deaths in the state are down from their peak last month, daily infections are still averaging more than 10,000 every day.

In spite of the dangers, California Democrats, with the support of the teachers' unions, are pressing ahead with plans to rapidly reopen schools in major cities throughout the state, in line with the nationwide campaign spearheaded by the Biden administration, which has described school reopenings as its top priority. On his second day in office, the Biden White House promised to have kindergarten through eighth grade students back to in-person learning by April 30.

The start of reopening yesterday of schools in Chicago, after the Chicago Teachers Union forced through a deadly and unpopular agreement with the school district, was only the beginning of a nationwide conflict pitting the ruling class, and above all the Democrats and their trade union lackeys, against teachers and the working class as a whole. One of the next major battlefields in the fight against the reopening of schools will be in California.

Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest school district in the country, has yet to announce its plans on reopening but is working behind the scenes with Governor Gavin Newsom to open the schools as state and local officials grow impatient with refusals to reopen campuses.

Cases and deaths in Los Angeles County are staggering and on the rise. Reported cases have reached 1.2 million with more than 18,000 deaths. Currently, there are only 330 free ICU beds available in the

county, as LA COVID hospitalizations just barely dip below a record high.

In the poorer neighborhoods of Los Angeles, nearly 1 in 3 school-age children tested are recording positive for COVID-19. The reopening of schools would be catastrophic for the families of students and teachers, as tragically the deaths of school workers, and even young children, are becoming less rare.

Last week, the Los Angeles city council published a letter in the *Los Angeles Times* to demand that schools reopen, and filed a lawsuit against the LA Unified School District for not reopening. LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner—who fully agrees with the need to reopen—argued the district cannot open immediately but only due to state restrictions. Beutner noted last week, “We are ready to reopen and want nothing more than to welcome children back to classrooms safely but we cannot break state law to do so.”

The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), meanwhile, has only requested that teachers be vaccinated before returning to the classroom. The demand for vaccinations, too, is a false choice. Even in the far-off scenario that every teacher in the United States has received their two vaccinations against COVID-19, children are still not vaccinated, and teacher vaccination does not prevent the contraction and spread of the virus among children. Moreover, the continued unabated spread of the virus produces mutations that are already putting the efficacy of current vaccines in question.

There is tremendous opposition to reopening schools among educators and other workers. “I am vehemently opposed to the reopening of LA schools and other

school districts during a time when the pandemic surge has not totally subsided,” Elizabeth, a registered nurse from Los Angeles, said. “It is irresponsible and dangerous to place teachers, children and families at risk of contracting COVID-19, and more so now with the contagious UK variant taking hold in LA County and predicted to become the dominant variant by March.

“Teachers, parents and other sectors of the working class must stand together and oppose the murderous policy of the ruling class that is only concerned with protecting the profits of Wall Street. They will not be safe until the virus is brought completely under control through a vigorous vaccination campaign. Teachers and other sectors of the working class must push back on the Democratic Party leaders and unions who are pushing for this murderous policy in the name of profits!”

This week **San Diego Unified School District** (SDUSD), the second largest district in the state, reached a deal with the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) to reopen in-person “learning labs” offered to students from low-income or immigrant families, homeless or foster students, or students with special needs. This plan allows more than 22,000 eligible students on campuses, of the district’s estimated 97,000 student population. These “learning labs,” which will hold up to fourteen K-5 students and ten 6–12 students per classroom, are the initial phase of throwing teachers and students back into classrooms.

The city’s schools are continuing with “hybrid” school returns, where select students are to be on-campus for a limited amount of time, and their teachers perform regular full day instruction. Currently, San Diego County has more than 35,800 students in full in-person instruction, 103,000 students in hybrid learning, and 34,200 employees on campus.

In a statement on the tentative agreement, SDUSD Board President Richard Barerra declared that once more teachers are able to get vaccinated, the district will begin requiring them to return to in-person instruction, even if the county case rate still remains in the “purple tier.” The major hospitals in the county currently remain near 100 percent ICU occupancy, as they have for most of the winter.

San Francisco is also pushing forward with reopening. Last week, the city filed a lawsuit, the first

of its kind, against its own school district, **San Francisco Unified School District** (SFUSD), claiming the district had “failed to offer classroom-based instruction whenever possible.” On Tuesday, the city attorney, Dennis Herrera, amended the lawsuit claiming “the district is violating the state constitution as well as state law by keeping students out of the classroom.”

SFUSD had originally planned to reopen schools for the district’s youngest as well as special education students under a hybrid model as early as January 25. Widespread opposition from teachers and parents effectively delayed reopening until March 25, as the district had not reached an agreement with the United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) in December. Since December negotiations with the district, UESF has demanded only that teachers be vaccinated prior to returning to classrooms.

Rank-and-file teachers and school workers understand that schools cannot be reopened safely, in any capacity, while COVID-19 continues to spread unmitigated and the vaccine distribution remains stalled. Resources must be equitably devoted to assuring students and teachers have the resources necessary to facilitate effective online education, and schools and non-essential production must remain closed until the spread of COVID-19 has been contained.

This requires a struggle not only against school administrators but the Democratic Party and the trade unions, which are serving as their chief instrument in beating back the opposition of teachers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all teachers and workers to join West Coast educators in the fight against reopening by joining rank-and-file safety committees in their area. For more information about joining or starting a rank-and-file safety committee, [click here](#).



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